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IMAGES (1910-1915)

By RICHARD ALDINGTON



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Non canimus surdis.

A number of these poems have already appeared: some in "Des Imagistes" (The Poetry Bookshop; New York, Boni); some in "Some Imagist Poets" (Constable & Co.; Boston & New York, Houghton Mifflin Co.); others in "The Egoist," and one in "Poetry and Drama." Others have appeared in American periodicals: "Poetry" (Chicago), "The Little Review" (Chicago), "The Poetry Journal" (Boston), and "Greenwich Village" (New York). Permission to reprint has in each case been granted by the publishers and editors concerned, to whom my thanks are due.

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PART I.

TO A GREEK MARBLE

Πότνια, πότνια,
White grave goddess,
Pity my sadness,
O silence of Paros.

I am not of these about thy feet,
These garments and decorum ;
I am thy brother,
Thy lover of aforesaid crying to thee,
And thou hearest me not.

I have whispered thee in thy solitudes
Of our loves in Phrygia,
The far ecstasy of burning noons
When the fragile pipes
Ceased in the cypress shade,
And the brown fingers of the shepherd
Moved over slim shoulders ;
And only the cicada sang.

I have told thee of the hills
And the lisp of reeds
And the sun upon thy breasts,

And thou hearest me not,
Πότνια, πότνια,
Thou hearest me not.

THE RIVER

I.

I drifted along the river
Until I moored my boat
By these crossed trunks.

Here the mist moves
Over fragile leaves and rushes,
Colourless waters and brown fading hills.

She has come from beneath the trees,
Moving within the mist,
A floating leaf.

II.

O blue flower of the evening,
You have touched my face
With your leaves of silver.
Love me, for I must depart.

IN AN OLD GARDEN

I have sat here happy in the gardens,
Watching the still pool and the reeds
And the dark clouds
Which the wind of the upper air
Tore like the green leafy boughs
Of the divers-hued trees of late summer ;
But though I greatly delight
In these and the water lilies,
That which sets me nighest to weeping
Is the rose and white colour of the smooth flag-stones,
And the pale yellow grasses
Among them.

BEAUTY THOU HAST HURT ME OVERMUCH

The light is a wound to me.
The soft notes
Feed upon the wounds.

Where wert thou born
O thou woe
That consumest my life?
Whither comest thou?

Toothed wind of the seas,
No man knows thy beginning.
As a bird with strong claws
Thou woundest me,
O beautiful sorrow.

ARGYRIA

O you,
O you most fair,
Swayer of reeds, whisperer
Among the flowering rushes,
You have hidden your hands
Beneath the poplar leaves,
You have given them to the white waters.

Swallow¹-fleet,
Sea-child cold from waves,
Slight reed that sang so blithely in the wind,
White cloud the white sun kissed into the air ;
Pan mourns for you.

White limbs, white song,
Pan mourns for you.

IN THE VIA SESTINA

O daughter of Isis,
Thou standest beside the wet highway
Of this decayed Rome,
A manifest harlot.

Straight and slim art thou
As a marble phallus ;
Thy face is the face of Isis
Carven

As she is carven in basalt.

And my heart stops with awe
At the presence of the gods,

There beside thee on the stall of images
Is the head of Osiris
Thy lord.

CHORICOS

The ancient songs
Pass deathward mournfully.

Cold lips that sing no more, and withered wreaths,
Regretful eyes, and drooping breasts and wings—
Symbols of ancient songs
Mournfully passing
Down to the great white surges,
Watched of none
Save the frail sea-birds
And the lithe pale girls,
Daughters of Okeanus.

And the songs pass
From the green land
Which lies upon the waves as a leaf
On the flowers of hyacinth ;
And they pass from the waters,
The manifold winds and the dim moon,
And they come,
Silently winging through soft Kimmerian dusk,
To the quiet level lands
That she keeps for us all,
That she wrought for us all for sleep
In the silver days of the earth's dawning—
Proserpina, daughter of Zeus.

And we turn from the Kyprian's breasts,
 And we turn from thee,
 Phoibos Apollon,
 And we turn from the music of old
 And the hills that we loved and the meads,
 And we turn from the fiery day,
 And the lips that were over sweet ;
 For silently
 Brushing the fields with red-shod feet,
 With purple robe
 Searing the flowers as with a sudden flame,
 Death,
 Thou hast come upon us.

And of all the ancient songs
 Passing to the swallow blue halls
 By the dark streams of Persephone,
 This only remains :
 That we turn to thee,
 Death,
 That we turn to thee, singing
 One last song.

O Death,
 Thou art an healing wind
 That blowest over white flowers
 A-tremble with dew ;

Thou art a wind flowing
 Over dark leagues of lonely sea ;
 Thou art the dusk and the fragrance ;
 Thou art the lips of love mournfully smiling ;
 Thou art the pale peace of one
 Satiated with old desires ;
 Thou art the silence of beauty,
 And we look no more for the morning,
 We yearn no more for the sun,
 Since with thy white hands,
 Death,
 Thou crownest us with the pallid chaplets,
 The slim colourless poppies
 Which in thy garden alone
 Softly thou gatherest.

And silently,
 And with slow feet approaching,
 And with bowed head and unlit eyes,
 We kneel before thee :
 And thou, leaning towards us,
 Caressingly layest upon us
 Flowers from thy thin cold hands,
 And, smiling as a chaste woman
 Knowing love in her heart,
 Thou seekest our eyes
 And the illimitable quietude
 Comes gently upon us.

IMAGES

I.

Like a gondola of green scented fruits
Drifting along the dark canals at Venice,
You, O exquisite one,
Have entered my desolate city.

II.

The blue smoke leaps
Like swirling clouds of birds vanishing.
So my love leaps forth towards you
Vanishes and is renewed.

III.

A rose-yellow moon in a pale sky
When the sunset is faint vermillion
On the mist among the tree-boughs
Are you to me.

IV.

As a young beech-tree on the edge of a forest
Stands still in the evening,
Then shudders through all its leaves in the light air
And seems to fear the stars—
So are you still and so tremble.

V.

The red deer are high on the mountain,
They are beyond the last pine-trees.
And my desires have run with them.

VI.

The flower which the wind has shaken
Is soon filled again with rain ;
So does my heart fill slowly with tears
Until you return.

A GIRL

You were that clear Sicilian fluting
That pains our thought even now.
You were the notes
Of cold fantastic grief
Some few found beautiful.

OCTOBER

The beech-leaves are silver
For lack of the tree's blood.

At your kiss my lips
Become like the autumn beech-leaves.

NEW LOVE

She has new leaves
After her dead flowers,
Like the little almond tree
Which the frost hurt.

THE FAUN SEES SNOW FOR THE FIRST TIME

Zeus,
 Brazen-thunder-hurler,
 Cloud-whirler, son-of-Kronos,
 Send vengeance on these Oreads
 Who strew
 White frozen flecks of mist and cloud
 Over the brown trees and the tufted grass
 Of the meadows, where the stream
 Runs black through shining banks
 Of bluish white.

Zeus,
 Are the halls of heaven broken up
 That you flake down upon me
 Feather-strips of marble?

Dis and Styx !
 When I stamp my hoof
 The frozen-cloud-specks jam into the cleft
 So that I reel upon two slippery points . . .

Fool, to stand here cursing
 When I might be running !

LEMURES

In Nineveh
And beyond Nineveh
In the dusk
They were afraid.

In Thebes of Egypt
In the dusk
They chanted of them to the dead.

In my Lesbos and Achaia
Where the God dwelt
We knew them.

Now men say " They are not " :
But in the dusk
Ere the white sun comes—
A gay child that bears a white candle—
I am afraid of their rustling,
Of their terrible silence,
The menace of their secrecy.

AMALFI

We will come down to you,
O very deep sea,
And drift upon your pale green waves
Like scattered petals.

We will come down to you from the hills,
From the scented lemon groves,
From the hot sun.
We will come down,
O Thalassa,
And drift upon
Your pale green waves
Like petals.

AT MITYLENE

O Artemis,
Will you not leave the dark fastness
And set your steel-white foot upon the foam,
And come across the rustling sand
Setting it adrift with the wind of your raiment?

For these women have laid out a purple cloth,
And they have builded you an altar
Of white shells for the honey.

O Artemis,
Girdle the gold about you,
Set the silver upon your hair
And remember us—
We, who have grown weary even of music,
We who would scream behind the wild dogs of Scythia.

HERMES, LEADER OF THE DEAD

We, who loved thy lyre,
Yet knew the end of all songs
A lamentation and a mourning ;
We, who loved Eos—
That maiden whiter than Narcissus—
And loved the midday heat, the sea-winds
Rustling across the vineyards ;
Now in the twilight
Hold forth trembling hands
To thee, Hermes,
Leader of the Dead.

Bear us upon thy winged flight
Down the dark blue ways unto Orcus ;
Make us stabile
With thy imperishable hands,
For our feet stumble, and age
Loosens our knees ;
Our wearied eyes
Yearn for the heavy bowed gold blossoms
Beneath the very grey sky
Of Persephone.

PART II.

SUMMER

A butterfly,
Black and scarlet,
Spotted with white,
Fans its wings
Over a privet flower . . .

A thousand crimson foxgloves,
Tall bloody pikes,
Stand motionless in a gravel quarry ;
The wind runs over them.

A rose film over a pale sky
Fantastically cut by dark chimneys ;
Candles winking in the windows
Across an old city garden.

AT THE BRITISH MUSEUM

I turn the page and read :

“ I dream of silent verses where the rhyme
Glides noiseless as an oar.”

The heavy musty air, the black desks,
The bent heads and the rustling noises
In the great dome
Vanish . . .

And

The sun hangs in the cobalt-blue sky,
The boat drifts over the lake shallows,
The fishes skim like umber shades through the undulating
weeds,
The oleanders drop their rosy petals on the lawns,
And the swallows dive and swirl and whistle
About the cleft battlements of Can Grande's castle . . .

JUNE RAIN

Hot, a griffin's mouth of flame,
The sun rasped with his golden tongue
The city's streets, till men and walls shrivelled ;
The dusty air stagnated.

At the third noon
A wind rippled,
A sea silently breaking ;
A thin veil of rain-drops
Hid the sun and the hard blue.

A grey garment of rain,
Cold as hoar-frost in April
Enwrapped us.

IN THE TUBE

The electric car jerks ;
 I stumble on the slats of the floor,
 Fall into a leather seat
 And look up.

A row of advertisements,
 A row of windows,
 Set in brown woodwork pitted with brass nails,
 A row of hard faces,
 Immobile,
 In the swaying train,
 Rush across the flickering background of fluted dingy
 tunnel ;
 A row of eyes,
 Eyes of greed, of pitiful blankness, of plethoric
 complacency,
 Immobile,
 Gaze, stare at one point,
 At my eyes.

Antagonism,
 Disgust,
 Immediate antipathy,
 Cut my brain, as a sharp dry reed
 Cuts a finger.

I surprise the same thought
 In the brasslike eyes :

“ What right have you to live ? ”

CINEMA EXIT

After the click and whirr
 Of the glimmering pictures,
 The dry feeling in the eyes
 As the sight follows the electric flickerings,
 The banal sentimentality of the films,
 The hushed concentration of the people,
 The tinkling piano—
 Suddenly
 A vast avalanch of greenish yellow light
 Pours over the threshold ;
 White globes darting vertical rays
 Spot the sombre buildings ;
 The violent gloom of the night
 Battles with the radiance ;
 Swift figures, legs, skirts, white cheeks, hats
 Flicker in oblique rays of dark and light.

Millions of human vermin
 Swarm sweating
 Along the night-arched cavernous roads.

(Happily rapid chemical processes
 Will disintegrate them all.)

EVENING

The chimneys, rank on rank,
Cut the clear sky ;
The moon,
With a rag of gauze about her loins
Poses among them, an awkward Venus—

And here am I looking wantonly at her
Over the kitchen sink.

HAMPSTEAD HEATH

(Easter Monday, 1915.)

Dark clouds, torn into gaps of livid sky,
Pierced through
By a swift searchlight, long and white like a dagger.

The black murmuring crowd flows, eddies, stops, flows on
Between the lights
And the banks of noisy booths.

ST. MARY'S, KENSINGTON

The orange plane-leaves
Rest gently on the cracked grey slabs
In the city churchyard.

O pitiful dead,
There is not one of those who pass by
To remember you.

But the trees do not forget ;
Their severed tresses
Are laid sadly above you.

AT NIGHTS

At nights I sit here,
Shading my eyes, shutting them if you glance up,
Pretending to doze,
And watching you,
Thinking.

I think of when I first saw the beauty of things—
 God knows I was poor enough and sad enough
 And humiliated enough—
 But not all the slights and the poorness and the worry
 Could hide away the green of the poplar leaves,
 The ripple and light of the little stream,
 The pattern of the ducks' feathers,
 The dawns I saw in the winter
 When I went shooting,
 The summer walks and the winter walks,
 The hot days with the cows coming down to the water,
 The flowers,
 Buttercups and meadowsweet and hog's parsley,
 And the larks singing in the morning, and the thrushes
 Trilling at dusk when I went out into the fields
 Muttering poetry.

I looked at the world as God did
 When first He made it.
 I saw that it was good.

And now at nights,
 Now that everything has gone right somehow,
 And I have friends and books
 And no more bitterness,
 I sit here, shading my eyes,
 Peeping at you, watching you,
 Thinking.

NIGHT PIECE

I lie awake ; and listen.

The water drips musically in the large zinc tank ; the little watch beside me ticks away the seconds of my life ; and at long intervals the bell of St. Mary Abbot's growls out huskily the quarters : ding, ding, *dang*, dong !

Silence. The water drips slower and more musically ; the watch ticks more gently ; the window curtain rustles a little in the wind and a faint confused glow of moonlight slips into the room.

Silence. I rise and draw the curtain. The white misty moonlight chequers the houses into blocks and lines and angles of watery silverish white and intense black shadows. There is no movement, no sound in the city.

No sound ? A train whistle blows very faint and shrill and clear and far away—clearer than bugles and as shrill as a wandering night bird. A train is running out from Marylebone or Victoria . . .

Very faint and shrill and far away the whistle sounds—more like a wild bird than ever. And my unsatisfied desires and empty wishes and vague yearnings are suddenly set aching by the thin tremulous whistle.

DAWN

It is night ; and silent.

The mist is still beside the frozen dyke ; it lies on the stiff grass, about the poplar trunks. The last star goes out. The gulls are coming up from the sea, crying, and drifting across like pieces of mist, like fragments of white cloth. They turn their heads and peer as they pass. The sky low down glows deep purple.

The plovers swirl and dart over the ploughed field beyond ; their screams are sorrowful and sharp. The purple drifts up the pale sky and grows redder. The mist stirs.

The brass on the harness of the plough-horses jingles as they come into the field. The birds rise in scattered knots. The mist trembles, grows thinner, rises. The red and gold sky shines dully on the ice.

The men shout across the thawing clods ; the ploughs creak ; the horses steam in the cold ; the plovers and gulls have gone ; the sparrows twitter.

The sky is gold and blue, very faint and damp.

It is day.

LONDON
(May, 1915.)

Glittering leaves
Dance in a squall ;
Behind them bleak immoveable clouds.

A church spire
Holds up a little brass cock
To peck at the blue wheat-fields.

Roofs, conical spires, tapering chimneys,
Livid with sunlight, lace the horizon.

A pear-tree, a broken white pyramid
In a dingy garden, troubles me
With ecstasy.

At night, the moon, a pregnant woman,
Walks cautiously over the slippery heavens.

And I am tormented,
Obsessed,
Among all this beauty,
With a vision of ruins,
Of walls crumbling into clay.

AFTER TWO YEARS

She is all so slight
And tender and white
As a May morning.
She walks without hood
At dusk. It is good
To hear her sing.

It is God's will
That I shall love her still
As He loves Mary,
And night and day
I will go forth to pray
That she love me.

She is as gold
Lovely, and far more cold.
Do thou pray with me,
For if I win grace
To kiss twice her face
God has done well to me.

65-BAKER

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